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THEY DON'T HAVE TO GET HURT

Continued from page sixteen

has devoted one third of his life to helping make sports safe for youngsters.

Two decades ago, appalled by the state's annual schoolboy crop of broken noses, fractured legs and dislocated vertebrae, the W.I.A.A. undertook the first recorded study of athletic injuries in the United States. When the final results were tabulated, the survey revealed a definite accident pattern. Early-season football injuries, for example, were found to be substantially above the season average. The W.I.A.A. promptly made it a state rule that each player undergo at least two weeks of pre-game practice, and shortly thereafter this type of injury was considerably reduced.

The survey also disclosed that many players were seriously hurt when they collided with benches, spectators and water buckets on the sidelines. Immediately, the W.I.A.A. ruled a five-yard safety zone around the actual field of play, which practically eliminated this type of injury. Analyzing these and other vital findings, Neverman and his associates worked out the first program in America to make sports competition safer.

Their next step was to introduce the Athletic Accident Benefit Plan, which for two dollars a year assured the school athlete that all usual medical expenses would be paid in the event of an injury. Previously, if a student was injured in the gymnasium or on the field, he had to pay his own medical expenses. Court verdicts in several states had ruled that the schools are not liable for damages in such cases.

Second-Half Injuries

Nor only does Wisconsin's Accident Benefit Plan pay the young athlete's hospital bills, but it guards him against future disaster. Students who apply for benefits must agree to abstain from sports until their wounds are completely healed.

Not long after the Benefit Plan got under way, Neverman realized that his files, bulging with detailed reports of athletic injuries, were a veritable gold mine. One fact brought to light was that in the first few minutes of the sec-

ond half of football games injuries were usually serious. It appeared that when the boys trotted out on the field again "they were stimulated mentally but physically cooled off." The coach's fervent locker-room pep talk had whipped them up to a reckless emotional pitch. Injuries often resulted. A present ruling requires a three-minute warming-up period before the start of the second half.

Broken Fingers

CARRYING this philosophy over into basketball, Neverman observed that players often failed to open their hands wide enough to catch the ball without risk to their fingertips. He promptly reduced the circumference of the ball used from the 32-inch college size to 29½ inches. Result: there was an 85-per-cent drop in the number of broken fingers.

Track events, too, were streamlined for the protection of the participants. The discus was cut down to a size that a high-school athlete could handle comfortably. When the high hurdle was shaved six inches, mishaps practically disappeared and six times as many boys entered the event. The javelin throw was dropped entirely as a competitive sport, since no way could be found to render it less hazardous. (Shoulder injuries often resulted from the strenuous whip of the arm required by the heavy missile.)

"A vital factor in preventing accidents is the removal of unnecessary hazards," Neverman told me. "The concrete walls of stadiums and arenas should be padded, to protect players who crash into them. Goal posts should be padded. Metal or wooden line-markers on the gridiron should be replaced by rubber ones. Athletes wearing glasses should use the shatterproof variety.

"Good housekeeping, the removal of extraneous material and provision of even surfaces will eliminate many casualties. This includes such items as picking up glass, rocks and sticks from the playing fields and keeping the gym floors in safe playing condition. Wooden floors of gymnasiums should have a bakelite finish. Cover the wet surfaces around swimming pools with non-skid

rubber matting, and you will prevent hundreds of serious falls.

"And it is ironic," observes Neverman, "that dozens of athletes survive danger on the football field only to die of pneumonia as a result of taking a shower after the game and walking into a chill climate with their hair wet. Hair-driers should be standard equipment in every high-school locker room."

Don Cash Seaton, famous expert on sports safety and adviser to New York University's Center for Safety Education, urges competent certified officials, in adequate numbers, for all contests. It is the duty of the official to see that substitutes warm up before entering a contest. He should remove a fatigued player from the game at the first sign of weakening.

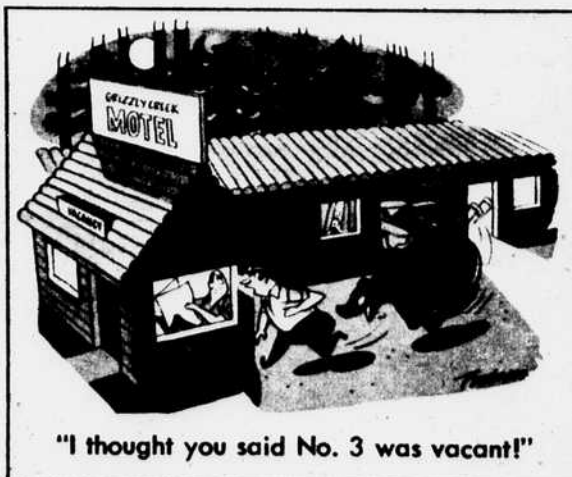
In basketball games between girl teams, the referee should always caution the players to remove their costume jewelry when they don their uniforms. Sharp pins, bracelets with sharp edges, can be a menace. Young ladies sporting long fingernails should have them clipped.

Eliminating Hazards

AMERICAN parents can do their part in making the sports field less grim than the battlefield. Through their PTA organizations and other groups they can pressure their schools' physical-education leaders into eliminating all possible athletic hazards. Meanwhile, Mr. and Mrs. America can take heart from the fact that the trend toward safety in sports is spreading like wildfire. Already the National Football League has banned the deadly plastic helmet for professional players. There is talk of setting up a school for the training of sports officials. The safer, lower hurdle and the smaller basketball have been accepted by every high school in the nation.

About half the states in the country have adopted the Wisconsin Accident Benefit Plan, and more are preparing to follow suit. True, we have a long way to go to fulfill the hope of Louis Pasteur, who said, "It is within the power of man to cause all preventable accidents to disappear from the face of the earth." But we're getting there.

The End



"I thought you said No. 3 was vacant!"



"And this, I presume, is the little husband"

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